UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
A 000 501 215 8

THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2007 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/waggonerotherpoe00bluniala

THE WAGGONER

THE WAGGONER

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

EDMUND BLUNDEN

LONDON
SIDGWICK & JACKSON, LTD
1920

First Edition . . . . . *August 1920*
Second Impression . . . *September 1920*

PR
6003
B62w

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE SILVER BIRD OF HERNDYKE MILL	1
THE WAGGONER	13
ALMSWOMEN	15
ON TURNING A STONE	18
THE PIKE	19
SHEEPBELLS	21
THE UNCHANGEABLE	22
A WATERPIECE	23
A COUNTRY GOD	24
THE SIGHING TIME	26
IN FESTUBERT	28
CHANGING MOON	30
MONT DE CASSEL	32
THE BARN	34
SICK-BED	36
LEISURE	39
PERCH-FISHING	43
CHINESE POND	46

752166

PAGE

MALEFACTORS 47

STORM AT HOPTIME 49

THE ESTRANGEMENT 53

WILDERNESS 55

CLARE'S GHOST 57

THE VETERAN 59

THE GODS OF THE EARTH BENEATH . . . 62

GLOSSARY 70

TO

MARY DAINES BLUNDEN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

SOME of the poems here collected have recently appeared in the *Nation*, *Owl*, *London Mercury*, *Athenæum*, *Voices*, and other periodicals. My thanks are due to the respective editors for permission to reprint. Others, such as 'The Silver Bird' and 'The Barn,' are chosen from a volume originally printed for private circulation in 1916: —*The Harbingers*.

EDMUND BLUNDEN.

THE SILVER BIRD OF HERNDYKE MILL

FOR SIEGFRIED SASSOON

By Herndyke Mill there haunts, folk tell,
A strange and silver-breasted bird;
Her call is like a silver bell,
So sweet a bell was never heard,—
The Silver Bird of Herndyke Mill,
That flies so fast against the blast,
And scares the stoat with one soft note—
To hear her sends the heart's blood chill.

The Charnel Path behind the Church,
When nights are blackest, makes me pause,
But there 'tis only magpies perch
And churning owls and goistering daws;
I fear the churchyard ghouls much less,
For all their flaming starving eyes,
Than that same Silver Bird which flies
And cries through Herndyke wilderness.

In summer time the carps and rudds
  Sun in their scores below the weir :
In winter time the hurtling floods
  Quag the firm soil and none go near.
But summer time as winter time,
  None dare invade that stream, that glade—
  Though mushrooms spring in many a ring—
For fear the Silver Bird should chime.

The stranger hears me with a smile.
  Why should a man so fear a bird ?
But listen to my words awhile,
  But listen till the whole is heard ;
And if your conscience be opprest
  With shameful act or wicked will,
  You dare not go to Herndyke Mill
Where flits the bird with silver breast.

Below the pleasant meeting-place
  Of deep main stream and dwindled leat,
Where flock and shine the skip-jack dace,
  By banks deep-grown in rabbits'-meat,

A little footbridge used to be—
A single plank from bank to bank,
A hand-rail white to gleam at night—
That led to a dim osiery.

In spring the sunlight green and cool
Dries up the seething grounds, and makes
The kingcups yet more beautiful
And ushers out the bright green snakes.
But no one loves the aguish mist
That writhes its way at eventide
Along the copse's waterside:
So rarely come they there to tryst.

No lovers loiter there: alone
The homeless man may break the bounds,
But in the years now fled and flown
The miller used to mind these grounds.
And sometimes on the bridge he stood
In twilight peace, at day's decease;
Sunk in his thought, as one who sought
To seem at one with stream and wood.

Now as he leant upon the rail
  One summer night when all the dells
Were hearkening to the nightingale,
  And sleepy wandering wethers' bells,
Out of the woodside quietly
  An ancient woman came, not fair,
  But crowned with shining silver hair,
And asked the miller's charity.

'Sir, I am faint with walking far,
  And penniless, and very old,
And under this unlucky star
  I have no home, come warm or cold.
I have no sons,—my splendid son
  That was my pride and dear love died,
  Died in the war against the Tsar;
And I am friendless, loved of none.'

The miller turned not nor replied—
  A hog-brained man whose god was greed.
'An alms for holy rood,' she cried,
  'And angels help you in your need.'

With that the miller spurned her: 'Go,
And who cares if you go to die?
God does not help you, then should I?
I doubt some sin has brought you low.'

For such harsh words she set on him
Like olden queens this black reproach
(And while she said it, down the stream
In darkness splashed a chub or roach),
'I go to die, aye, in this wood,
My silver hair shall tarnish there;
And by God's word a silver bird
Therefrom shall spring, the bird of Good.

'The silver locks that care has made
Shall so become a silver breast—
The bird of Good shall never fade,
Here shall she fly, and here shall rest.
If evil men come near her grange
She shall affright them with her sweet
Monotony of notes, and beat
Her wings about them fair and strange.

'The holy presence of God shall awe
The evil-doer that passes here.
From your white mill, and your green shaw,
Shall spring a rumour sped with fear,
The Silver Bird, God's messenger,
Shall guard the shrine of things divine,
And your foul lie shall never die
While men are left that looked on her.'

Her words were sharp as knives or pins:
The miller stood as carved in stone.
No more: the silence made him wince;
He looked, and found himself alone.
A rustling in the tenterhooks
Of brambles told him where she went,
And with that rustling softly blent
The ripple-dripple of the brooks.

The water shone, the stars looked on,
The footfall in the coppice died;
A bat swerved oddly and was gone,
A half-awakened night-wind sighed;

The miller with his heavy tread
  Was nearly to his threshold yew,
  A dor flew by with crackling cry
And chilled him with a sort of dread.

Now morning trod the dews once more
  And led abroad the rookery :
The pigeons flaunted round his door,
  The wheel rolled round contentedly.
Free went the miller's callous tongue :
  He had forgot the wanderer's curse,
  Or else he found himself no worse ;
Mellow the sunlight was and young.

And so he went his wonted ways
  And robbed the farmers when he could,
And by slid many summer days
  Before again he walked his wood.
But in the sighing of the year,
  The shocked-up sheaves and withered leaves,
  The mourning nooks and sullen brooks
Brought back the woman's menace clear.

The sallows, how they shake and swirl
  As chilled by Autumn's palsied hands,
Their yellowed leaves so twitch and twirl
  That down they drop like wasted brands.
They clog and huddle the tired stream
  Beruffled with the dismal draught
  Until their golden foundered craft
Jostle the fins of groping bream.

There seems no heart in wood or wide,
  The midday comes with twilight fears,
The winds along the coverside
  Pause like bewildered travellers—
The grumping miller picked his way,
  Intent to hound from off his ground
  A travelling man whose caravan
In cover of the coppice lay.

The sighing of the year was borne
  Deep, deep into the miller's soul.
The very footbridge looked forlorn,
  And *plop* plunged in a startled vole.

What shadows made his fancy grim,
Born of the outcast woman's word—
When all at once a silver bird
Was hovering, calling over him.

Her chiming channelled through his brain,
Her bright eyes held him, spelled him there.
He struck at her, he struck in vain,
She fluttered round him, strange and fair.
And with her was that holy power,
So pure-intense as stilled his sense,
And in his ears the voice of tears
Grew slowly like a mournful flower.

The daylight dwindled from his eyes,
A haze grew on him filled with moan :
His dazed soul stumbled with surmise,
He walked the wilds of fear alone.
O who can tell what carking days
He seemed to pass in this wild spell,
Through what intolerable hell
Of phantoms with their searching gaze !

At last from glooms the silver breast
  Took fashion, and the dull day's light
Was round him (never light so blest),
  And then the Silver Bird took flight.
Now miller, see your punishment,
  Your golden gain has brought forth pain,
  Your spoutsman's boy has more of joy
With Friday shilling well content.

Now, many a month and many a year
  Has died away on holt and hill
Since that rich tyrant told his fear
  And fled in haste and shut the mill.
And such stark tales have come to me,
  Whom neighbours call Poor Poaching Jack,
  As every time have turned me back
From footing Herndyke shrubbery.

I 've shot down pheasants from their roost
  By moonlight in the woods of squires :
In open day I 've often noosed
  The vicar's pike with tickling wires.

I 've fooled a mort of keepers round,
  Risked Redstone Jail and could not fail ;
  But yon woodside I never tried
For fear of that which guards the ground.

The waters underneath the weir
  Hold battening monster fish by shoals :
And if a man be conscience-clear
  He well may come with baits and trolls ;
And sure his creel would soon be full
  If, fearless of the bird of Good,
  He angled all along the wood,
And in the black and sulky pool.

And nettles bunch where pansies flowered
  Within the garden's gap-struck pale,
And where the mill-wheel's spouting showered
  The bearded waters well-nigh fail :
And resolute wasps come year by year
  Through bank's warm clay to forge their way
  And build their nests, so on their quests
Throughout the jungled garth they steer.

Among those twisted apple-trees
The gentle sunlights do abound :
They burn along like yellow bees
And chequer all the shadowy ground :
The golden nobs and pippins swell
And all unnoticed waste their prime,
For few men love to hear the chime
That brings the world of woe pell-mell.

By Herndyke Mill there haunts, folk tell,
A holy silver-breasted bird ;
Her call is like a silver bell,
So sweet a bell was never heard,—
The Silver Bird of Herndyke Mill,
That flies so fast against the blast,
And routs the stoat with one soft note—
To hear her sends a man's blood chill.

January 1916.

THE WAGGONER

The old waggon drudges through the miry lane
By the skulking pond where the pollards frown,
Notched, dumb, surly images of pain;
On a dulled earth the night droops down.

Wincing to slow and wistful airs
The leaves on the shrubbed oaks know their hour,
And the unknown wandering spoiler bares
The thorned black hedge of a mournful shower.

Small bodies fluster in the dead brown wrack
As the stumbling shaft-horse jingles past,
And the waggoner flicks his whip a crack:
The odd light flares on shadows vast

Over the lodges and oasts and byres
Of the darkened farm; the moment hangs wan
As though nature flagged and all desires.
But in the dim court the ghost is gone

From the hug-secret yew to the penthouse wall,
And stooping there seems to listen to
The waggoner leading the gray to stall,
As centuries past itself would do.

1919.

ALMSWOMEN

FOR NANCY AND ROBERT

At Quincey's moat the squandering village ends,
And there in the almshouse dwell the dearest friends
Of all the village, two old dames that cling
As close as any trueloves in the spring.
Long, long ago they passed threescore-and-ten,
And in this doll's house lived together then ;
All things they have in common, being so poor,
And their one fear, Death's shadow at the door.
Each sundown makes them mournful, each sunrise
Brings back the brightness in their failing eyes.

How happy go the rich fair-weather days
When on the roadside folk stare in amaze
At such a honeycomb of fruit and flowers
As mellows round their threshold ; what long hours
They gloat upon their steepling hollyhocks,
Bee's balsams, feathery southernwood, and stocks,

Fiery dragon's-mouths, great mallow leaves
For salves, and lemon-plants in bushy sheaves,
Shagged Esau's-hands with five green finger-tips.
Such old sweet names are ever on their lips.
As pleased as little children where these grow
In cobbled pattens and worn gowns they go,
Proud of their wisdom when on gooseberry shoots
They stuck eggshells to fright from coming fruits
The brisk-billed rascals ; pausing still to see
Their neighbour owls saunter from tree to tree,
Or in the hushing half-light mouse the lane
Long-winged and lordly.
But when those hours wane,
Indoors they ponder, scared by the harsh storm
Whose pelting saracens on the window swarm,
And listen for the mail to clatter past
And church clock's deep bay withering on the blast ;
They feed the fire that flings a freakish light
On pictured kings and queens grotesquely bright,
Platters and pitchers, faded calendars
And graceful hour-glass trim with lavenders.

Many a time they kiss and cry, and pray
That both be summoned in the selfsame day,

And wiseman linnet tinkling in his cage
End too with them the friendship of old age,
And all together leave their treasured room
Some bell-like evening when the may 's in bloom.

1920.

ON TURNING A STONE

FOR ALAN PORTER

Trolls and pixies unbeknown
Lodged beneath a sunken stone!
Their malevolence makes scream
Children startled in a dream.

O their hundred flickering eyes
Dazzled with day's enterprise—
Scimble-scamble black they run
Scared to rout by shining sun.

1916.

THE PIKE

From shadows of rich oaks outpeer
The moss-green bastions of the weir,
Where the quick dipper forages
In elver-peopled crevices,
And a small runlet trickling down the sluice
Gossamer music tires not to unloose.

Else round the broad pool's hush
Nothing stirs,
Unless sometime a straggling heifer crush
Through the thronged spinney where the pheasant whirs;
Or martins in a flash
Come with wild mirth to dip their magical wings,
While in the shallow some doomed bulrush swings
At whose hid root the diver vole's teeth gnash.

And nigh this toppling reed, still as the dead
The great pike lies, the murderous patriarch
Watching the waterpit sheer-shelving dark,
Where through the plash his lithe bright vassals thread.

The rose-finned roach and bluish bream
And staring ruffe steal up the stream
Hard by their glutted tyrant, now
Still as a sunken bough.

He on the sandbank lies,
  Sunning himself long hours
With stony gorgon eyes:
  Westward the hot sun lowers.

Sudden the gray pike changes, and quivering poises for slaughter;
Intense terror wakens around him, the shoals scud awry, but there chances
A chub unsuspecting; the prowling fins quicken, in fury he lances;
And the miller that opens the hatch stands amazed at the whirl in the water.

1919.

SHEEPBELLS

Moonsweet the summer evening steals
  Upon the babbling day :
Mournfully, most mournfully
  Light dies away.

There the yew, the solitary,
Vaults a deeper melancholy,
As from distant dells
Chance music wells
From the browsing-bells.

Thus they dingle, thus they chime,
  While the woodlark's dimpling rings
In the dim air climb ;
In the dim and dewy loneness,
  Where the woodlark sings.

1916.

THE UNCHANGEABLE

THOUGH I within these two last years of grace
Have seen bright Ancre scourged to brackish mire,
And meagre Belgian becks by dale and chace
Stamped into sloughs of death with battering fire,—
Spite of all this, I sing you high and low,
My old loves, waters, be you shoal or deep,
Waters whose lazy and continual flow
Learns at the drizzling weir the tongue of sleep.

For Sussex cries from primrose lags and brakes,
'Why do you leave my woods untrod so long?
Still float the bronze carp on my lilied lakes,
Still the wood-fairies round my spring wells throng;
And chancing lights on willowy waterbreaks
Dance to the dabbling brooks' midsummer song.'

1917.

A WATERPIECE

The wild-rose bush lets loll
Her sweet-breathed petals on the pearl-smooth pool,
The bream-pool overshadowed with the cool
Of oaks where myriad mumbling wings patrol.

There the live dimness burrs with droning glees
Of hobby-horses with their starting eyes,
And violet humble-bees and dizzy flies,
That from the dewsprings drink the honeyed lees.

Up the slow stream the immemorial bream
(For when had Death dominion over them ?)
Through green pavilions of ghost leaf and stem,
A conclave of blue shadows in a dream,
Glide on ; idola that forgotten plan,
Incomparably wise, the doom of man.

1919.

A COUNTRY GOD

When groping farms are lanterned up
  And stolchy ploughlands hid in grief,
And glimmering byroads catch the drop
  That weeps from sprawling twig and leaf,
And heavy-hearted spins the wind
  Among the tattered flags of Mirth,—
Then who but I flit to and fro,
With shuddering speech, with mope and mow,
  And glass the eyes of earth ?

Then haunt I by some moaning brook
  Where lank and snaky brambles swim,
Or where the hill pines swartly look
  I whirry through the dark and hymn
A dull-voiced dirge and threnody,
  An echo of the sad world's drone
That now appals the friendly stars—
O wail for blind brave youth, whose wars
  Turn happiness to stone.

How rang the cavern-shades of old
To my melodious pipes, and then
My bright-haired bergomask patrolled
Each lawn and plot for laughter's din :
Never a sower flung broadcast,
No hedger brished nor scythesman swung,
Nor maiden trod the purpling press,
But I was by to guard and bless
And for their solace sung.

* * *

But now the sower's hand is writhed
In livid death, the bright rhythm stolen,
The gold grain flatted and unscythed,
The boars in the vineyard, gnarled and sullen,
Havocking the grapes ; and the pouncing wind
Spins the spattered leaves of the glen
In a mockery dance, death's hue-and-cry ;
With all my murmurous pipes flung by
And summer not to come again.

1918.

THE SIGHING TIME

THE sighing time, the sighing time ! . . .
The old house mourns and shudders so ;
And the bleak garrets' crevices
Like whirring distaffs utter dread :
Streams of shadow people go
By hollow stairs and passages,
In black cloths herding out their dead.
Along the creaking corridors
They troop with sighs, grayhead and young,
They droop their heads in bitter tears.
The panels yawn like charnel doors
Where the dark windows ivy-clung
Are gloating spiders' belvederes.
Without, like old Laocoön,
The yewtree claws the serpent gusts,
The wicket swings with peacock screams.
Time in the courtyard leans upon
His pausing scythe, in dim mistrusts
And sad recalls of summer dreams.

The garden, cynically sown
With leaves in death unlovely, bows
Its tragic plume of pipy stalks :
Poison-spores have overgrown
In crazy-coloured death-carouse
The parterres and the lovers' walks.
The anguished sun is swiftly set,
And Hesper's primrose coronal
Is sullied with distortions pale.
The grange bell in its minaret
With dreary three-times-dreary call
Dingles in the gale.
The sighing time, the sighing time.

1917.

IN FESTUBERT

Now everything that shadowy thought
  Lets peer with bedlam eyes at me
From alleyways and thoroughfares
  Of cynic and ill memory
Lifts a gaunt head, sullenly stares,
  Shuns me as a child has shunned
A hizzing dragonfly that daps
  Above his mudded pond.

Now bitter frosts, muffling the morn
  In old days, crunch the grass anew ;
There, where the floods made fields forlorn
  The glinzy ice grows thicker through,
The pollards glower like mummies when
  Thieves pierce the long-locked pyramid,
Inscrutable as those dead men
  With painted mask and balm-cloth hid ;

And all the old delight is cursed
  Redoubling present undelight.
Splinter, crystal, splinter and burst;
  And sear no more with second sight.

1916.

CHANGING MOON

The green east hagged with prowling storm,
The troubled rising radiance there,
The wheatland ripe and warm,
And rainy voices wandering the dull air.

The church tower standing in the stars
Drones to pale stones the hour fulfilled,
In shadowed triumph jars
The fern owl in his clustered copse ; where spilled

From splintered hatch to swirling bay,
Then fluttering by scrawled shingles and shells,
The wild brook trolls away
To mirror moonlight in the heathery dells.

By ivied palings whispering frets
The palsied dust, the drouthy green ;
And on the parapets
Of the fen bridge the mushroom-gatherers lean

To hear the moon-mad gypsy rave
In meadows by the stricken mill,
Where with the browsing thaive
She lays her down in the dewed grass, and shrill

Laughs out as she and the sick moon stare
Through flour-choked windows, and can spy
The grudging ghost's despair
And where his useless gold and silver lie.

MONT DE CASSEL

HERE on the sunnier scarp of the hill let us rest,
And hoard the hastening hour,
Find a mercy unexpressed
In the chance wild flower
We may find on the pathway side, or the glintering
flint,
Or other things so small and unregarded :
Descry far windows fired with the sun, to whom
Nothing is small or mean.
To us, let the war be a leering ghost now shriven,
And as though it had never been ;
A tragedy mask discarded.
A lamp in a tomb.
What though in the hounded east, now we are gone,
The thunder-throated cannonade boom on ?
Too long we have striven,
Too soon we return.
The white stone roads go valleyward from the height,

Like our hopes, to be lost in haze
Where the bonfires burn
With the dross of summer days
(Our summer hideous, harvesting affright).
Ah, see the silver Spirit dream among his quiet dells.
Hear the slow, slumbrous bells,
The voices of a world long by,
Come dim and clear and dim
As the wheatlands sleep or sigh.
Fall into musings thence, let Psyche stray
Where she lists,
Among small things of little account,
Or through the coloured mists ;—
Myriad the roads to the visionary mount,
And the white forehead of the Mystery.
  But, alas, she falls in a swoon,
  Pale-lipped like a withering moon ;
So terrible is the insistency
Of the east, where, like a fiend automaton,
The thunder-throated cannonade booms on.

September 1917.

THE BARN

Rain-sunken roof, grown green and thin
For sparrows' nests and starlings' nests;
Dishevelled eaves; unwieldy doors,
Cracked rusty pump, and oaken floors,
And idly-pencilled names and jests
Upon the posts within.

The light pales at the spider's lust,
The wind tangs through the shattered pane:
An empty hop-poke spreads across
The gaping frame to mend the loss
And keeps out sun as well as rain,
Mildewed with clammy dust.

The smell of apples stored in hay
And homely cattle-cake is there.
Use and disuse have come to terms,
The walls are hollowed out by worms,
But men's feet keep the mid-floor bare
And free from worse decay.

All merry noise of hens astir
Or sparrows squabbling on the roof
Comes to the barn's broad open door ;
You hear upon the stable floor
Old hungry Dapple strike his hoof,
And the blue fan-tail's whir.

The barn is old, and very old,
But not a place of spectral fear.
Cobwebs and dust and speckling sun
Come to old buildings every one.
Long since they made their dwelling here,
And here you may behold

Nothing but simple wane and change ;
Your tread will wake no ghost, your voice
Will fall on silence undeterred.
No phantom wailing will be heard,
Only the farm's blithe cheerful noise ;
The barn is old, not strange.

SICK-BED

HALF dead with fever, here in bed I sprawl,
In candlelight watching the odd flies crawl
Across the ceiling's bleak white desolation ;—
Can they not yet have heard of gravitation ?—
Hung upside down above the precipice
To doze the night out ; ignorance is bliss !
Your blood be on your heads, ridiculous flies.

Dizzying with these, I glare and tantalise
At the motley hides of books which moulder here :
' On Choosing a Career,' ' Ten Thousand a Year ' ;
' Ellis on Sheep,' ' Lamb's Tales,' a doleful Gay,
A has-been Young, dead ' Lives,' vermilion Gray,
And a whole corps of 1790 twelves.
My eye goes blurred along these gruesome shelves,
My brain whirs ' Poems of . . . Poems of . . .' like a clock ;
And I stare for my life at the square black ebony block

Of darkness in the open window-frame.
Then my thoughts flash in one white searching flame
On my little lost daughter ; I gasp and grasp to see
Her shy smile pondering out who I might be,
Her rathe-ripe rounded cheeks, near-violet eyes.
Long may I stare ; her stony fate denies
The vision of her, though tired Fancy's sight
Scrawl with pale curves the dead and scornful night.

All the night's full of questing flights and calls
Of owls and bats, white owls from time-struck walls,
Bats with their shrivelled speech and dragonish wings.
Beneath, a strange step crunches the ash path, where
None goes so late, I know : the mute vast air
Wakes to a great sigh.
Now the murmurings,
Cricks, rustlings, knocks, all forms of tiny sound
That have long been happening in my room half-heard,
Grow fast and fierce, each one a ghostly word.
I feel the grutching pixies hedge me round ;

'Folly,' sneers courage (and flies). Stealthily creaks
The threshold, fingers fumble, terror speaks,
And, bursting into sweats, I muffle deep
My face in pillows, praying for merciful sleep.

1919.

LEISURE

Listen, and lose not the sweet luring cry,
Nor let the far-off torches gleam in vain ;
The moments are so few, so soon slipt by,
And yet so rare to lull the harried brain.
For now is autumn fully come, and steals
In a king's day-dream over weald and wold,
And the last honey is scoured, the last sheaf housed ;
And the boon earth reveals,
With the melodious drone of plenty drowsed,
Leisure and loving-kindness manifold.

Then when the early primroses of day
Bud through the cool mist, fail, oh, fail not then
To scan the sign of beauty, nor betray
The soul's first love that might not flower again.
And calm and marvellous the wide lands lie
Dim with awakening-notes of little birds ;
And the delighted Spirit in the dells
Woos the sun's opening eye
With his droll night-whims, puffballs' pepper-gourds,
Startling white mushrooms and bronze chantarelles.

Gentle and dewy-bright the landscape fills
Through the serene and crystal atmosphere ;
Night's blackamoors sink into reedy ghylls
To skulk unsunned till eve's pale lantern peer ;
And silver elvish gossamers go dance
On twinkling voyages at the caprice
Of autumn half-asleep and idly playing
With fancies as they chance,
The feather's fall, the doomed red leaf delaying,
And all the tiny circumstance of peace.

Along the purpled bramble-brake he treads,
The giant sauntering like a peasant boy,
Murmuring a song, brushing through russet beds
Of sunburned bracken with ' Hi-gee ' and ' Whoi ' ;
Forgetting all the tumult and the toil
Of harvest, for the vale farms all are still,
Save thatchers on the yellow ricks, or where
Smoke's light blue pennants coil
From white-coned oasts, or bonfires fume and flare,
Or flagging breezes twirl the black-vanned mill.

Now the old hedger with his half-moon hook,
Plashing the spiked thorn, musing of bygone men,
Shakes the crab-apples plopping in the brook
Till jangling wild-geese flush from the drowned fen.
Nodding he plods in his grey revery,
Self-sorry robins humouring his thought's cast;
While scarce perceived, by red walls warm with peaches,
By bosque and signal-tree,
And otters'-lodges on the river reaches,
The feather-footed moments tiptoe past.

Tranquilly beats the country's heart to-day,—
Golden-age beckonings, olden pastoral things,
Fantastically near and far away,
Stretch in the sunny calm their blazoned wings.
Then tarry, tiptoe moments, nor too soon
Let death beat down your saffron butterflies
Nor crush your trembling autumn crocuses,
But in a gradual swoon
Let long dreams flaunt till eve accomplishes
And round the down the tide mist multiplies.

To-morrow's brindled shouting storms will flood
The purblind hollows with a leaden rain
And flat the gleaning-fields to choking mud
And writhe the groaning woods with bursts of pain.
What though that wrath relent ere night ? the hills,
Lonely in sharp light from horizons cold,
Shall sadden, and the vapour-piercing spires,
Where the last sunlight thrills,
Jewelling the ghost-white city with wistful fires,
Bring tears like lost delights and tales long told.

To-morrow—but to-day, to-day is young.
Still nods the sunflower, still the church owls prey,
Nor yet has sparrow chirped nor cockerel flung
From cobwebbed rafters his third roundelay,
Which is the very music of the morn.
Those hours of peaceful witchcraft are to come ;
Wander we lovingly and gather store
Of balms for griefs unborn :
Lest the far fairy cressets beck no more,
Lest the frail elf pipes be for ever dumb.

1919.

PERCH-FISHING

FOR G. W. PALMER

On the far hill the cloud of thunder grew
And sunlight blurred below : but sultry blue
Burned yet on the valley water where it hoards
Behind the miller's elmen floodgate boards,
And there the wasps, that lodge them ill-concealed
In the vole's empty house, still drove afield
To plunder touchwood from old crippled trees
And build their young ones their hutched nurseries ;
Still creaked the grasshoppers' rasping unison
Nor had the whisper through the tansies run
Nor weather-wisest bird gone home.

How then
Should wry eels in the pebbled shallows ken
Lightning coming ? troubled up they stole
To the deep-shadowed sullen water-hole,
Among whose warty snags the quaint perch lair.

As cunning stole the boy to angle there,
Muffling least tread, with no noise balancing through
The hangdog alder-boughs his bright bamboo.
Down plumbed the shuttled ledger, and the quill
On the quicksilver water lay dead still.

A sharp snatch, swirling to-fro of the line,
He 's lost, he 's won, with splash and scuffling shine
Past the low-lapping brandy-flowers drawn in,
The ogling hunchback perch with needled fin.
And there beside him one as large as he,
Following his hooked mate, careless who shall see
Or what befall him, close and closer yet—
The startled boy might take him in his net
That folds the other.
Slow, while on the clay
The other flounces, slow he sinks away.

What agony usurps that watery brain
For comradeship of twenty summers slain,
For such delights below the flashing weir
And up the sluice-cut, playing buccaneer
Among the minnows ; lolling in hot sun
When bathing vagabonds had drest and done ;

Rootling in salty flannel-weed for meal
And river shrimps, when hushed the trundling wheel;
Snapping the dapping moth, and with new wonder
Prowling through old drowned barges falling asunder.
And O a thousand things the whole year through
They did together, never more to do.

1919.

CHINESE POND

Chinese pond is quick with leeches :
From its island knoll of beeches
  Peers the temple, standing yet,
  Heaped with dead leaves, all alone.

Mildew dims the lacquered panels
Where the channering insect channels ;
  Blood-red dragons pine and fret
  Who glared so grimly thereupon.

Mother-pearl and pink shells once
In formal geometricons
  Counterchanged the inner wall :
  Frieze and hangings, both are gone.

Knavish robin reconnoitres,
Unabashed the woodmouse loiters,
  Brown owls hoot at shadow-fall,
  Deathwatch ticks and beetles drone.

1919.

MALEFACTORS

Nailed to these green laths long ago,
You cramp and shrivel into dross,
Blotched with mildews, gnawed with moss,
And now the eye can scarcely know
The snake among you from the kite—
So sharp does Death's fang bite.

I guess your stories ; you were shot
Hovering above the miller's chicks ;
And you, coiled on his threshold bricks—
Hissing, you died ; and you, Sir Stoat,
Dazzled with stableman's lantern stood
And tasted crabtree wood.

Here then, you leered-at luckless churls,
Clutched to your clumsy gibbet, shrink
To shapeless orts ; hard by the brink
Of this black scowling pond that swirls
To turn the wheel beneath the mill,
The wheel so long since still.

There 's your revenge, the wheel at tether,
The miller gone, the white planks rotten,
The very name of the mill forgotten,
Dimness and silence met together . . . .
Felons of fur and feather, can
There lurk some crime in man—

In man, your executioner,
Whom here Fate's cudgel battered down ?
Did he too filch from squire and clown ? . . .
The damp gust makes the ivy whir
Like passing death, the sluices well,
Dreary as a passing-bell.

1919.

STORM AT HOPTIME

FOR H. JOHN MASSINGHAM

THE hoptime came with sun and shower
That made the hops hang hale and good;
The village swarmed with motley folk,
Far through the morning calm awoke
Noise of the toiling multitude
Who stripped the tall bine's bower.

Slatternly folk from mean, sad streets
And crowded courts like rusty wells
Pick in that live and fragrant air;
Gipsies with jewelled fingers there
Gaze dark, speak low; their manner tells
Of thievings and deceits.

And country dames with mittened wrists,
Grandams and girls and mothers stand
And stretch the bine-head on the bin,
And deftly jerk the loosed hops in.
Black stains the never-resting hand
So white for springtide trysts.

And by and by the smaller boys,
Tired with the work and women's talk,
Make slyly off, and run at large
Down to the river, board the barge
Roped in to shore, and stand to baulk
The bargee's angry noise.

While through the avenues of hops
The measurers and the pokeboys go.
The measurers scoop the heaped hops out,
While gaitered binmen move about
With sharpened hopdog, at whose blow
The stubborn cluster drops.

Such was the scene that autumn morn,
But when the dryer in his oast
Had loaded up his lattice-floors,
He called a binman at the doors,
'We want no more; the kilns are closed.
Bid measurer blow the horn.'

The binman found the measurer pleased,
For hops were clean and work was through;

He told him what the dryer said.
The measurer nodded his sheep's head,
Lifted the battered horn and blew,
And so the day's work ceased.

Then shawls were donned, chip-hats also,
But none too soon before the crash :
The sky was taking ugly looks :
In thunder-yellow lights the rooks
Flew crowding into elm and ash
And gloom began to grow.

The air was loud with bleating droves,
Dead-hot and tense ; the southern hills
Were crushed in cerecloths, white like steam ;
The dust whirled round the homeward team,
Rain splashed the whited window-sills
And rustled in the groves.

Thunder and thunder came to war.
In startling suddenness vast cloud
Dropped shreds of blackness, drooped in rain
And deluged garths and hops and grain,
And lightnings plunged and firebolts ploughed
Through cloudy steep and scaur.

The rainstorm harried all the vale
In steady flood, no separate drops;
Big bubbles oozed from sodden ground,
The shower-butts flowed, the dykes were drowned,
But there the lowland wealth of hops
    Was spared the scythe of hail,

The hissing hail that swept alone
The tall challenging hog-backed hurst;
Jagged cruel hailstones tore the hops
And gashed the bines from the hop-pole tops,
And eddying screaming winds outburst
    And flung the hop-poles prone.

1914.

THE ESTRANGEMENT

Dim through cloud veils the moonlight trembles down,
A cold grey vapour, on the huddling town ;
And far from cut-throat's corner the eye sees
Unsilvered hogs'-backs, pallid stubble leas ;
Barn-ridges gaunt and gleamless : blue like ghosts
The knoll mill and the odd cowls of the oasts,
And lonely homes pondering with joys and fears
The dusty travail of three hundred years.

In the ashen twilight momently afield,
Like thistle-wool wafting across the weald,
Flickers the sighing spirit ; as he passes,
The lispering aspens and the scarfed brook grasses
With wakened melancholy writhe the air.

In the false moonlight wails my old despair,
And I am but a pipe for its wild moan ;
Crying through the misty bypaths ; slumber-
banned ;
Impelled and voiced, to piercing coronach blown :

A hounded kern in this grim No Man's Land,
I am spurned between the secret countersigns
Of every little grain of rustling sand
In these parched lanes where the gray wind maligns ;
Oaks, once my friends, with ugly murmurings
Madden me, and ivy whirs like condor wings :
The very bat that stoops and whips askance
Shrills malice at the soul grown strange in France.

1919.

WILDERNESS

FOR JOY BLUNDEN

On lonely Kinton Green all day
The half-blind tottering plough-horse grieves,
Dim chimes and crowings far away
Come drifting down the wind like leaves ;
And there the wood 's a coloured mist,
So close the blackthorns intertwist,—

The blackthorns clung with heapen sloes,
Blue-veiled to weather coming cold,
And ruby-tasselled shepherd's rose,
Where flock the finches plumed with gold,
And swarming brambles laden still
Though boys and wasps have ate their fill.

Here shining out on lubber boughs,
The lantern crabs hang gold with light
In smoke that mouldering leaves unhouse,
Like stars in frost as sharp and bright :
And here the blackbird deigns to choose
His blood-red haws by ones and twos.

Cob-spider runs his glistening maze
  To murder doddering hungry flies;
Curt echo mocks the mocking jays,
  The partridge in the stubble cries;
And Hob and Nob like blind men pass
Down to the Bull for pipe and glass.

1919.

CLARE'S GHOST

Pitch-dark night shuts in, and the rising gale
Is full of the presage of rain,
And there comes a withered wail
From the wainscot and jarring pane,
And a long funeral surge
Like a wood god's dirge,
Like the wash of the shoreward tides, from the firs on the crest.

The shaking hedges blacken, the last gold flag
Lowers from the west;
The Advent bell moans wild like a witch hag
In the storm's unrest,
And the lychgate lantern's candle weaves a shroud,
And the unlatched gate shrieks loud.

Up fly the smithy sparks, but are baffled from soaring
By the pelting scurry, and ever
As puff the bellows, a multitude more outpouring
Die foiled in the endeavour;

And a stranger stands with me here in the glow
Chinked through the door, and marks
The sparks
Perish in whirlpool wind, and if I go
To the delta of cypress, where the glebe gate cries,
I see him there, with his streaming hair
And his eyes
Piercing beyond our human firmament,
Lit with a burning deathless discontent.

1917.

THE VETERAN

FOR G. H. HARRISON

He stumbles silver-haired among his bees,
Now with the warm sun mantling him ; he plods,
Taking his honey under the pippin-trees,
Where every sprig with rich red harvest nods.
He marks the skies' intents,
And like a child, his joy still springing new,
In this fantastic garden the year through
He steeps himself in nature's opulence.

Mellow between the leafy maze smiles down
September's sun, swelling his multitude
Of gold and red and green and russet-brown
Lavished in plenty's lusty-handed mood
For this old man who goes
Reckoning ripeness, shoring the lolling sprays,
And fruits which early gusts made castaways
From the deep grasses thriftily rescuing those.

Babble he will, lingeringly, lovingly,
Of all the glories of this fruitful place,
Counting the virtues of each several tree,
Her years, her yield, her hardihood or grace;
While through this triumph-song,
As through their shielding leaves, the year's fruits burn
In bright eye-cozening colour, turn by turn,
From cool black cherries till gold quinces throng

Blossoming the blue mists with their queenly scent . . .
Who hearing him can think what dragging years
Of drouthy raids and frontier-fights he spent,
With drum and fife to drown his clamouring fears? . . .
Here where the grapes turn red
On the red walls, and honey in the hives
Is like drift snow, contentment only thrives,
And the long misery of the Line is dead.

Resting in his old oaken-raftered room,
He sits and watches the departing light
Crimsoning like his apple-trees in bloom,
With dreaming gratitude and calm delight.

And fast the peering sun
Has lit the blue delft ranged along the wall,
The painted clock and Squirrel's Funeral,
And through the cobwebs traced his rusty gun.

And then the dusk, and sleep, and while he sleeps,
Apple-scent floods and honey's fragrance there,
And old-time wines, whose secret he still keeps,
Are beautiful upon the marvelling air.
And if sleep seem unsound,
And set old bugles pealing through the dark,
Waked on the instant, he but wakes to hark
His bellman cockerel crying the first round.

1919.

THE GODS OF THE EARTH BENEATH

I AM the god of things that burrow and creep,
Slow-worms and glow-worms, mouldwarps working late,
Emmets and lizards, hollow-haunting toads,
Adders and effets, groundwasps ravenous:
After his kind the weasel does me homage,
And even surly badger and brown fox
Are faithful in a thousand things to me.
From these and myriads more
Hark to the praises murmuringly abroad,
This very drowsy buzz of glowing noon,
All through the low-shorn grass:
The morning hedger with his brishing-hook,
That never saw me, knows me to be near
To greet the greetings of my minikin folk.
Six brothers, too, I have, gods like to me,
Whose sort I will declare; and maybe you,
Way-weary traveller, with your broad bright eyes,

That well can reverence us, the lesser gods,
Shall see themselves anon.
And first of him who (saving me) were least.
He has dominion over every plant
That stretches a tapering root, or twists a mass
Of thrusting fibres white as bleachen bones,
Or sends long straying creepers : his are roots
Of every tree : and such love waits on him
And such free trust and troth that all trees give,
That some droop down their green boughs, still adoring,
So that they brush the ground, and you may see
In yonder avenue of limes, how some
Have dipt their down-curved branches in the earth,
For him ; and so regardful is his care
That the lopped tree, be it but stub or stock,
Thrives and stands crowned with leafits in a year.
Even the pales that husbandmen set up
Have put forth roots—so bountiful is the love
Shown to his worshippers.
Sir, tell me whether you at any time
Have seen a river-god ?—your pleasant heart
Keeps your eyes clear to scan the things that few
Discern ? Ay, you have seen a river-god,

Dear, honest man, in whom such virtue lives ;
Then have you spied in summer, when the weeds
Thicken and lazily swelter to the sun,
In some clear water that the stonefish love
One moving softly in a dream of good
In form like this of mine ?
He is my brother, fifth among the gods :
Over snagged river-beds and water-sands
He rules : there is no yellow or blue clay
Paving a river's travel, no flat rock
On which deep waters tarry, no gold sand
Of shallows with the shealings chalky white,
But it is consecrate of old to him,
And with it all its creatures honour him—
All fishes, save the fierce, unfaithful eel
That climbs floodgates and travels through wet fields
From pool to pool ; or down to the sea's wild works,
Slides past a thousand eyots lovelessly.
The shells that lie along the paven strand
When summer shrinks the water—think you these
Were clustered by the winter's heaping floods ?
Not so could they entangle sunset flame
Nor I read in them water-fables old ;

But they were tinted with the god's own hand,
The god's own hand set them in charactery.
He holes the green bank, knit with sinewy roots,
That fish may haven there when raging suns
Have made them languish : for he loves them well.
Therefore, when thunder spreads his pirate flag,
Threatening black crime, and up the shallow steers
King eel as thick as any reaper's wrist,
My brother roves the reeds, churns up the sands
In warning to the fishes young and small ;
And hence befooled the ravening eel fights shy,
Thinking to cross the pike his enemy.
Such is the river god.

And fourth among us, not unlike to him,
Living amid the dead calm of deep waters
Of sullen lakes and pits (unfathomable
By all the woodmen's tales) there is a god
Of white and golden water-lily pageants.
The languorous water-lily, that some call clote,
Through his perpetual labourings, can climb
Up from the silt, that flees the eye of day,
Still striving and still striving up to air.
Most worthy she the endeavour of a god.
And with such beauty ever in desire

Her god is pleased to mansion undescried
Deep down: yet you shall see him by good chance,
Shapen like mist, that dewlight finds abroad,
Hovering above the sleeping lilies: then
The great sun strides on, frighting the blue fogs,
And with them flees the lily-god away.

Up on the hill, where brambling hops are now
Near firm enough to pick, quarrymen have found
Gold pieces bedded in the beaten earth,
Trinkets of other centuries, treasure trove;
Nor this without its god, the tunnelling god.
To whom all buried coins, all precious things,
All strakes of gold and silver amid rocks,
All porphyries, agates, emeralds, starry stones
Are known and charted. From his treasure-house
He thins frail gold for crowns of daffodil,
And inlays silver leaves for ladysmocks.
With rubies is his palace underground
Windowed, to let the cavern's twilight in;
Of alabaster are his buttresses,
Of pallid mica his perpetual doors,
And all the walls of gold, the walks of gold.
So, silver-sandalled, down those glorious ways

He triumphs, and his people cry his praise—
Even the jewels and stones called dumb cry out.
Above him, yet not greatest,
The god of waters vanished underground
Calls to me, bids me tell of him. Dull streams
Flow flagging in the undescribed deep fourms
Of creatures born the first of all, long dead :
Wherefore he guides their channels and stifled songs,
And fills them with delight of headlong falls
To keep the echoes roaring all through time.
And blind fish grow
Giant among those deeps where light comes never ;
He sets the blanched weeds there that are their food,
And heals them from all taints and maladies.
No man has seen this god : who plies along
The vast lakes never dreamed nor plummeted,
The tiny runlet drippling steep down rocks,
The river rolling darkly tunnelled in,
And of his realms is absolute emperor.
Of six gods have you heard, and over us all
Is set one greater. He most craftily
Brings out of death the loveliest looks of life,
And from corruption alchemizes beauty.
Where the dead leaves piled,

Lo, windflowers and the etched uncrumpled fern,
And where the corpse was hid, come wallflowers,
And in the moss-dank oak stub, primroses.
And those who forage in November's woods
Find toadstools twired and hued fantastically
Yellow, and yellow-mottled red, and black,
In all antique and unimagined vogues.
For these are his ephemeral pastimes,
Played for the whims of beauty, and then gone.
He stells the meadows in similitude
Of stars in black sky-spaces, in his hands
He catches filtering flames of rise and set
To be the sunshine of the buttercup,
The sunlight of the darnel. Where graves are,
He haunts to make unloveliness be blossoms;
Where hosts have hewn down hosts in war, he is
For ever harvesting their sepulchres
With tokens of the days to come, wild flowers.—
Good traveller, through your weather-beaten look
A radiance ever lightens out to me,
Born of a loyal love: but now the pipe
Of pewits newly fledged, from sunken ground,
Brimmed with the moving mists that usher cold,
Shrills clear, and warns me to the waterpit.

Across the sandy path the tiny frogs
Go yerking, and already it grows dark.

* * *

With that the Traveller's eyes were sealed afresh,
So that he saw the god no more : but then
He thought he heard a music spangled over
With unexpected echoes ; so tears came,
And happy words there blossomed in his heart.

1915-1916.

GLOSSARY OF A FEW LOCAL OR DIALECT WORDS

Dor . .	Dor-hawk, nightjar.
Elver-peopled	Young eels are fond of the silk-weed on old watergates, and the clefts in the masonry behind the weed.
Esau's-hands	Old-fashioned creeping garden plants, shaped like star-fish.
Fourms .	Hares' lurking-places.
Glinzy .	Slippery.
Goistering .	Guffawing.
Hopdog .	Long-handled curved knife for hop-gardens.
Lubber .	Sprawling.
Rabbits'-meat	Wild parsley.
Shealings .	Long flat pebbles.
Spoutsman .	Miller's man.
Thaive .	Ewe (of two years).

Printed by T. and A. Constable, Printers to His Majesty
at Edinburgh University Press

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA LIBRARY
Los Angeles
This book is DUE on the last date stamped below.

Form L9–100m-9,'52(A3105)444

THE LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

PR Blunden -
6003 The waggoner.
B62w

PR
6003
B62w